

Davenport House  
Rock Island  
Rock Island County  
Illinois

HABS No. ILL 158  
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*Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings*

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District 1 of Illinois

Historic American Buildings Survey

Prepared at Washington Office

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED  
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED

THE DAVENPORT HOUSE  
Rock Island, Illinois  
Rock Island County

Owner - The United States, War Department

Date of Erection - 1833. Rebuilt without original wings in 1906.

Builder - Col. George Davenport. Rebuilt by the Old Settlers' Association of Rock Island County, under revocable license to repair and maintain the structure.

Present Condition - Good. Comparison of the present structure with early photographs shows important differences, such as omission of wings, changed entrance details, etc.

Number of Stories - Main portion and rear wing two, side wings one.

Materials of Construction - Foundations and chimneys, native rubble stone; walls, braced frame with clap-board exterior. Tin conductor heads, wood shingle roof.

Additional Data - This mansion was erected on Rock Island by Col. George Davenport in 1833 not far from his first large double log cabin, which he had used for both residence and Indian trade up to that time. Col. Davenport, who was a famed early trader, enjoyed great prestige among the Indians and white settlers of the region. He laid out the town of Davenport and took part in the framing of the treaty of 1842 with the Sacs and Foxes.

Born in England in 1783, he came up the Mississippi in 1806 and was killed by river ruffians in 1845, at his own threshold.

Early photographs of the house show it to have been of a highly developed type for the Mid-west, with well proportioned side and rear wings, one of the former having perhaps served as an office. Davenport, who was a man of broad culture, travelled widely throughout the East and South and his familiarity with finest Colonial and post-Colonial traditions shows in its architectural lines. Its good proportion, skillful assemblage of tasteful detail and the exterior chimneys, make the Davenport House uniquely interesting.

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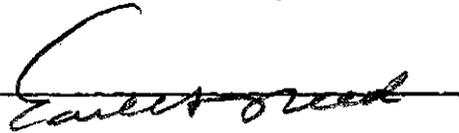
It is very regrettable that this outstanding home of a great pioneer could not have been more carefully restored, as its present state fails to give adequate idea of its early excellence.

It is located in a quiet corner of the busy Rock Island Arsenal Grounds, near the site of old Fort Armstrong and not far from the bridge-head of the first bridge to be thrown across the Mississippi in 1856, namely that of the Chicago and Rock Island Railway, in connection with which Lincoln acted as attorney.

The Arsenal, itself, was established in civil war days, along with a prison camp. It is now an army store depot of great importance.

Sources - Davenport "Past and Present", Frank B. Wilkie, 1858. Statements of A. G. Gillespie, Colonel, Ordnance Department. Article on Rock Island Arsenal, Federal Writers' Project.

By

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Earl J. ...", written over a horizontal line.

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HABS No. IL-158

Addendum to  
Rock Island Arsenal  
Davenport House  
(Building 346)  
Rock Island  
Rock Island County  
Illinois

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ADDENDUM TO  
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DAVENPORT HOUSE  
(Building 346)

HABS No. IL-158

Location:

Davenport Drive,  
Rock Island Arsenal,  
Rock Island,  
Rock Island County, Illinois

USGS Davenport East Quadrangle,  
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:  
15.703900.4599300

Present Owner:

U.S. Army

Present Occupant:

Colonel Davenport Historical Foundation

Present Use:

Historic house museum

Significance:

The Davenport House is significant for both its architecture and close association with George Davenport. The building is a rare, frontier-era, Greek Revival structure that served as Davenport's home from the time of its construction in 1833 until Davenport's death in 1845. Davenport first came to Rock Island in 1816 as sutler for Fort Armstrong. During the next quarter of century, he became one of the area's most prominent fur traders, merchants, and land speculators. He was instrumental in founding both Rock Island, Illinois, and Davenport, Iowa, which was named in his honor. The Davenport House is part of the Rock Island Arsenal National Register Historic District.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: According to Benjamin Goble, who worked on the house, construction of the log frame began in May 1832 and was completed the following July (Goble, p. 20). In August 1833, Pierre Chouteau, a St. Louis merchant, shipped Davenport twelve bundles of shingles, and the house was probably roofed that same summer (Bill of Lading). In October 1833, Davenport wrote a friend in St. Louis that the house had been "lathed and ruffcoated" and that the final plastering would be completed in the spring of 1834 (Davenport to Sarpy, October 29, 1833).

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2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: In 1844, by a special act of Congress, George Davenport was given title to the house along with a surrounding quarter section of land (Flagler, p. 25). In 1867, the federal government bought back the house and land from Davenport's heirs (Flagler, pp. 151-152). Since that time, the house has been owned by the U.S. Army.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The contract builders were Gentry McGee and Martin Smith, who hired Benjamin Goble to assist them in the framing (Goble, p. 20). Henry Shaw of St. Louis supplied nails, glass, door knobs, hinges, screws, and other building materials (Invoice). Pierre Chouteau of St. Louis supplied shingles (Bill of Lading).
5. Original plans and construction: No original drawings or plans have been located. According to Benjamin Goble, who helped build the house, the original structure was a "two-story dwelling" with a frame of hewn logs (Goble, p. 20). According to Davenport, the original construction included "four rooms 18 feet by 18, two passages 10 by 18 and one porch & portico" (Davenport to Sarpy, September 7, 1833). A 1907 newspaper article confirms these details and notes that the house originally had clapboard siding and plastered stone chimneys on the east and west elevations ("Davenport House Remarkable"). The earliest known views of the house appear on an 1857 manuscript map ("Map of Upper Rapids"). This document presents a schematic plan view of the building showing wings on the east, west, and south elevations. A cartouche on the map contains an illustration of the north elevation, showing a five-bay, two-story, gable-roofed structure flanked by one-story wings to the east and west. The central two-story section has side chimneys and a pedimented front porch with two front columns. The building's present configuration closely resembles the 1857 illustration of the central two-story section.
6. Alterations and additions: Before 1857 (if the illustrations on the 1857 map are accurate), one-story, frame, gable-roofed wings were added to the east and west elevations of the central two-story section, and a wing of unknown height was added to the south elevation. The Rock Island Arsenal Historical Office has an undated, nineteenth-century photograph showing a two-story south wing in delapidated condition without a roof.

Before 1864, the front porch was apparently remodeled with four front columns, which are shown in a photograph, dated "c. 1864,"

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in the picture collection of the Rock Island Arsenal Historical Office (see HABS Photo No. IL-158-25).

Before 1900, the one-story east wing was removed, as shown by an undated, nineteenth-century photograph in the picture collection of the Rock Island Arsenal Historical Office (see HABS Photo No. IL-158-26).

In 1906, the building was the subject of a major restoration effort sponsored by the Rock Island Old Settler's Association ("Fund Is Donated"). This entailed the removal of the south and west wings, the reconstruction of the original foundation with new stonework, and the replacement of siding, rafters, and sash ("Restoring the Old Davenport House"; MacDonald and Mack Partnership, pp. 5-9). The restored building is shown in a 1919 photograph in the picture collection of the Rock Island Arsenal Historical Office (see HABS Photo No. IL-158-27).

In 1959, the Quad Cities Association of Home Builders began a restoration project that included roofing, siding, plastering, and interior painting. This project was completed in 1966 (MacDonald and Mack Partnership, p. 34).

B. Historical Context:

George Davenport first came to Rock Island in 1816 as sutler for the newly established Fort Armstrong. Resigning his post at the fort the next year, Davenport embarked on a highly successful career as a fur trader and merchant. In recognition of various services he provided the federal government, he was permitted to construct a private residence on government land on the northwest shore of the island. In May 1832, Davenport negotiated a contract for a two-story building with Gentry McGee and Martin Smith, who completed the log frame in July of the same year. After purchasing a variety of building materials from St. Louis merchants, Davenport arranged for initial plastering in the fall of 1833 and final plastering in the spring of 1834. In 1844, by a special act of Congress, Davenport officially received title to the property. He occupied the house until his death in 1845; his family continued to reside there for at least a few years more (Walker and Stephens, p. 1).

When the Army began constructing a prisoner-of-war camp on the island in 1863, the government rented the house from Davenport's heirs for use as an administrative office for the prison. From 1864 to about 1866, the building served the same purpose for the arsenal command (Walker and Stephens, p. 1). In 1867, the government purchased the property from the Davenport family as part of a general program to

eliminate private ownership on the island. For most of the remainder of the nineteenth-century, the building stood empty and gradually fell into serious disrepair. Although the building was restored in 1906 by the Rock Island Old Settlers' Association, it continued vacant and once again suffered neglect. In 1959, the Quad Cities Association of Home Builders received permission from the Army to restore and operate the building as a historic site (MacDonald and Mack Partnership, p. 34). Furnished with donated period furniture, the building was first opened to the public in 1966 (Walker and Stephens, p. 2). In 1978, the Colonel Davenport Historical Foundation was established to continue the building's use as an historic house museum (MacDonald and Mack Partnership, p. 34; for additional documentation, see HAER No. 1L-20.)

Prepared by: Jeffrey A. Hess  
MacDonald and Mack Partnership  
February 1985

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The house is a two-story, rectangular-plan frame residence with a gabled roof. It survives as the central core of a much larger house, formerly having three wings. The Greek Revival style of the original house was augmented with Colonial Revival style characteristics in 1906 during a substantial restoration, at which time the heavily deteriorated wings were demolished.
2. Condition of fabric: Although the house is well-maintained it is beginning to show signs of deterioration.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The house measures 47' (5 bays) x 19' (3 bays). The house is two stories with a crawlspace and an unfinished attic.
2. Foundations: Foundations are rubble limestone.
3. Walls: Walls (HABS Photo Nos. 1L-158-20, 1L-158-21, and 1L-158-22) are covered with narrow clapboard siding with corner boards, a sill board, and a flat frieze board.
4. Structural systems: The walls are solid logs. Floor systems are sawn wood joists. Roof framing is sawn wood rafters and beams.

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5. Porches: The front entrance porch (HABS Photo Nos. IL-158-21 and IL-158-22) is centered on the north elevation. It has a rectangular-plan wood base fronted by a broad pair of wooden steps without railing. At the two north corners are wooden Doric columns. These are complemented by flat Doric pilasters against the house wall at the south corners of the porch. They support a full Doric entablature and cornice. At the north elevation is a triangular pediment with cornice and flushboard siding. The low, gable roof is covered with wood shingles. The columns, pilasters, entablature, cornices, ceiling and pediment are all painted white.

At the second bay from the east end of the south (rear) elevation is a wooden ramp (HABS Photo No. IL-158-20) with plain wooden railings.

6. Chimneys: Centered in the east and west elevations are the two original, large, rectangular chimneys (HABS Photo Nos. IL-158-20 and IL-158-21). They project fully from the walls and rise from grade to above the roof ridge. Both are brick, covered with cement stucco with minimal corbelled caps.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways: The main doorway (HABS Photo Nos. IL-158-21 and IL-158-22), centered in the central bay of the front elevation, contains a wood door with sidelights and a transom. The six-panelled door is painted black in contrast to the casing, which is painted white. Each sidelight has a three-light, fixed, sash painted black above a single wood panel painted white. The elliptical transom contains a seven-light, fixed, wood sash painted black, as well. The jamb faces of the casing each contain a single, simple panel, as does the elliptical head above the transom.

At the second and third bays from the east end of the south (rear) elevation are two doorways (HABS Photo No. IL-158-20) which lack any casings and contain six-panel wood doors painted black.
  - b. Windows: In general, window openings (HABS Photo Nos. IL-158-20 and IL-158-21) are symmetrically located on the elevations. Two window openings flank each side of the front porch. Five openings correspond at the second floor level to the window openings and doorway below. North of the chimneys at the second floor level in the east and west elevations are single window openings. South elevation window openings are located at the first and second bays from the west of the first floor level. At the second floor level there are window openings in

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the two west bays, the central bay and the center of the two east bays. Each opening contains a six-over-six, double-hung, wood sash painted black in a minimal wood frame painted white with a projecting sill painted black. Original exterior wood shutters are missing.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The gable roof (HABS Photo Nos. IL-158-20 and IL-158-21) is covered with wood shingles.
- b. Cornice and eaves: The minimal wood cornice and eaves (HABS Photo Nos. IL-158-20 and IL-158-21) are painted white. Metal gutters are set near the edges of the north and south sides of the roof. They feed downspouts at each corner of the building which drain to the ground.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The floor plans are quite simple. A central stair hall is flanked by a parlor at each end of the first floor and by a bedroom at each end of the second floor. A small room is partitioned from the north side of the second-floor stair hall.
2. Stairways: The only stairway (HABS Photo No. IL-158-24), located in the central stair hall runs from the first to the second floor in a U-plan with a lower run along the west wall and an upper run along the east wall and an intermediate landing along the south wall. Built of walnut and cherry, it has all exposed surfaces finished with clear varnish. Along the open well is an open stringer and along the outer walls is a molded baseboard. The simple, round handrail is supported by thin, square balusters with five simple, turned newel posts at the bottom of the steps, the top of the lower run, the base of the upper run, the top of the upper run, and the intersection of the upper landing railing with the west wall.
3. Flooring: All flooring (HABS Photo Nos. IL-158-23 and IL-158-24) is varnished hardwood.
4. Wall and ceiling finishes: All walls and ceilings (HABS Photo Nos. IL-158-23 and IL-158-24) are covered with textured plaster. The walls are painted light yellow and the ceilings are painted white. The parlors and first-floor stair hall each have molded wood chair rails (HABS Photo No. IL-158-23) painted white.

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5. Openings:

- a. Doorways: There are five doorways (HABS Photo No. IL-158-24) in the house opening from the parlors, bedrooms, and center second-floor room into the central stair hall. All are identical, having narrow, molded, wood casings with six-panel, wood doors similar to the exterior doors. The casings and doors are painted white.
- b. Windows: The first- and second-floor windows (HABS Photo Nos. IL-158-23 and IL-158-24) have narrow, molded, wood casings similar to those of the doorways, but with molded wood sills. The casings and sash are painted white.

6. Decorative features and trim: Throughout the first and second floors there are molded wood baseboards (HABS Photo Nos. IL-158-23 and IL-158-24) with quarter-round toeboards painted white. Flanking each side of the parlor fireplaces are built-in wood cupboards (HABS Photo No. IL-158-23) stretching from the floor to near the ceiling. They are each divided into an upper and a lower section by a wood shelf aligned with the chair rail. Each upper section has a pair of three-panelled door leaves fronting a set of interior shelves. Each lower section has a pair of single-panelled wood door leaves also fronting a set of interior shelves. All four cupboards are painted white.

Each parlor and each bedroom has a fireplace. All four fireplaces have brick hearths with wide joints and wooden mantelpieces. The east parlor mantelpiece has single, flat Doric pilasters flanking the openings and supporting a very wide, molded, wood entablature and shelf. The west parlor (HABS Photo No. IL-158-23) and west bedroom mantelpieces are identical, with round Doric pilasters supporting a wide, molded wood entablature and shelf. The east bedroom mantelpiece has flat, panelled pilasters supporting a wide, panelled entablature and shelf. All mantelpieces are painted white. No original firebacks, andirons, frames, covers, or other fireplace hardware appears to have survived.

7. Hardware: Most hardware in the house dates from the 1906 restoration. Door hardware includes small, cast-iron hinges, cast-iron knob sets with white porcelain knobs and cast-iron lock boxes. There is no window hardware at all.

8. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Heating, air-conditioning, ventilation: The fireplaces provide the only heat for the house, but they are unused. There are no air-conditioning or mechanical ventilation systems.

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- b. Lighting: No original lighting fixtures survive, nor are there any modern lighting fixtures in the house, although there is limited electrical service.
- c. Plumbing: The house was not plumbed originally, nor has it ever received any plumbing fixtures or systems.

D. Site:

General setting and orientation: The house is set in a parklike area of the northwest section of the arsenal. It is encircled by Davenport Drive, a one-lane, paved access road. The site is characterized by large trees, sweeping expanses of mowed lawn, and a view to the north of the Mississippi River. This bucolic setting is somewhat marred by the presence of Building 344, a large warehouse, in a fenced enclosure east of the house.

Prepared by: David Arbogast  
Architectural Conservator  
February 1985

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Early Views: The earliest known views of the building are a schematic plan view and a drawing of the north elevation contained in an 1857 manuscript map entitled, "Map of Upper Rapids of the Mississippi River from Davenport & Rock Island to Le Claire." This document is in the Rock Island County Historical Society; a photographic copy is in the picture collection of the Rock Island Arsenal Historical Office. The drawing shows the building's north elevation with a central, two-story section flanked by one-story wings to the east and west. The plan view shows an additional wing on the south elevation. The two-story section is probably the building's original configuration. The Rock Island Arsenal Historical Office also has early photographs of the building showing the remodeled front porch about 1864 (see HABS Photo No. IL-158-25), the removal of the east wing (see HABS Photo No. 1L-158-26), and the completed restoration project of 1906 (see HABS Photo No. IL-158-27).

B. Bibliography:

- 1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Bill of Lading from Pierre Chouteau to George Davenport, August 27, 1833. Chouteau Maffit Collection, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis; photocopy in Rock Island Arsenal Historical Office. Notes shipment of shingles from St. Louis merchant.

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Davenport, George to J. B. Sarpy, September 7, 1833. Photocopy in Rock Island Arsenal Historical Office. Letter describing building's dimensions for plastering.

Davenport, George to J. B. Sarpy, October 29, 1833. Photocopy in Rock Island Arsenal Historical Office. Letter describing plastering of building.

Hess, Jeffrey A., and Mack, Robert C. "Historic Properties Report Rock Island Arsenal, Rock Island, Illinois". Prepared by MacDonald and Mack Partnership, and Building Technology Incorporated for the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1985. The report, with accompanying inventory cards, is filed as field records in the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, under HAER No. IL-20.

Invoice from Henry Shaw to George Davenport, April 6, 1833. Chouteau Maffit Collection, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis; photocopy in Rock Island Arsenal Historical Office. Itemizes building materials purchased from St. Louis merchant.

MacDonald and Mack Partnership. "Colonel George Davenport House." Preliminary report prepared for Colonel Davenport Historical Foundation, 1984. Rock Island Arsenal Historical Office. Discusses original construction and remodeling of house; based on documentary research and physical inspection.

"Map of Upper Rapids of the Mississippi River from Davenport & Rock Island to Le Claire," 1857. Rock Island County Historical Society, Rock Island, Illinois; photographic copy in Rock Island Arsenal Historical Office. Contains illustration of building's north elevation, and a schematic plan view showing the south wing.

Real Property Cards, Engineering Plans and Services Division, Rock Island Arsenal. Briefly describes building's structural characteristics and provides sketchy history of maintenance operations.

Walker, T. W. and Stephens, C. W. "The Davenport House." N.d. Brief summary of building's history from 1832 to 1966. Rock Island Arsenal Historical Office.

2. Secondary and published sources:

"Davenport Home Remarkable." Rock Island Argus, January 5,

1907. Photocopy in Rock Island Arsenal Historical Office. Describes original construction and 1906 restoration project.

Flagler, D[aniel] W[ebster]. A History of the Rock Island Arsenal from Its Establishment in 1863 to December 1876. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1877. Discusses Davenport's role as sutler to Fort Armstrong, his acquisition of the building site, and the government's purchase of the site.

"Fund Is Donated." Rock Island Argus, August 31, 1906. Photocopy in Rock Island Arsenal Historical Office. Discusses planning for 1906 restoration of building.

Goble, Benjamin. A Narrative of Incidents in the Life of an Illinois Pioneer. Moline: Kennedy Steam Book and Job Printers, 1881, repr., Knightstown, Ind.: The Bookmark, 1977. Brief description of building's construction by one of the original builders.

"Restoring the Old Davenport Home." November 16, 1906. Photocopy in Rock Island Arsenal Historical Office. Describes original construction, later additions, and 1906 restoration project.

#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was part of a program initiated through a memorandum of agreement between the National Park Service and the U.S. Department of the Army. Stanley J. Fried, Chief, Real Estate Branch of Headquarters DARCOM, and Dr. Robert J. Kapsch, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, were program directors. Sally Kress Tompkins of HABS/HAER was program manager, and Robie S. Lange of HABS/HAER was project manager. Building Technology Incorporated, Silver Spring, Maryland, under the direction of William A. Brenner, acted as primary contractor, and MacDonald and Mack Partnership, Minneapolis, was a major subcontractor. The project included a survey of historic properties at Rock Island Arsenal, as well as preparation of an historic properties report and HABS/HAER documentation for 38 buildings. The survey, report, and documentation were completed by Jeffrey A. Hess, historian, Minneapolis; Barbara E. Hightower, historian, Minneapolis; David Arbogast, architectural historian, Iowa City, Iowa; and Robert C. Mack, architect, Minneapolis. The photographs were taken by Robert A. Ryan, J Geronie, and Bruce A. Harms of Dennett, Muessig, Ryan, and Associates, Ltd., Iowa City, Iowa. Drawings were produced by John Palmer Low, Minneapolis.